

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT TO BE PREPARED ON PROPOSED RULES GOVERNING SOME MINING ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

The public is invited to participate in the preparation of an environmental assessment on proposed rules that would govern surface management of mining operations on national wildlife refuges, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, announced today.

The proposed rules would apply to mining operations authorized by the Mining Law of 1872, including both metallic and non-metallic minerals such as gold, silver, cinnabar, lead, tin, copper, uranium, borax, feldspar, gypsum, and molybdenum. The rules would not affect coal, oil, gas, and other minerals subject to leasing laws.

Most national wildlife refuges are closed to mining, but there are about 500 existing mining claims on nine refuges in Alaska, several hundred on Sheldon National Wildlife Refuge in Nevada and on Kofa National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona, and a small number on Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in Arizona.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is considering establishing rules that would be similar to rules proposed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to prevent unnecessary and undue degradation of BLM lands from mining operations. The rules would not spell out mining methods, but would specify conditions under which mining could take place. A plan for all mining operations that affect surface resources (such as streams, wetlands, or vegetation) would be required, and site-specific environmental impact documents would have to be prepared in the process of approving a mining operation plan. The rules would also require miners to reclaim disturbed areas as soon as possible during the mining process.

Because of the similarity between the rules being considered by the Service and those proposed by BLM, the Service intends to adopt the environmental impact statement prepared for BLM's rules. Necessary changes from BLM's rules resulting from the different statutes that control administration of the National Wildlife Refuge System will be addressed in the Service's environmental assessment.

The public is invited to a meeting to discuss the scope of the environmental assessment on Wednesday, November 5, at 1 p.m., Room 3241 of the U.S. Department of the Interior, 18th & C Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C. Notice of the public meeting was published in the October 22, 1980, Federal Register. For more information, interested persons may contact Bill Reffalt, Chief, Refuge Management Division, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (202/343-4791).